

North Chicago, IL - U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk joined North Chicago Mayor Leon Rockingham and several local leaders on Tuesday to welcome home nine Youthbuild Lake County trainees and three staffers who spent the last week helping rebuild homes devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The trainees spent a week in Gulfport, Mississippi, gutting damaged homes and rebuilding interiors with Youthbuild trainees from across the country. During the ceremony, three students shared with the congressman their experiences in Gulfport, how the Youthbuild program changed their lives and where the trainees hope to be a year from now.

"I am so proud of the Youthbuild team for taking the caring spirit of our communities to Mississippi," said Congressman Kirk. "Many of these young men and women faced serious personal challenges. Their effort to help their fellow Americans in need will also set their own lives back on track. That's why I strongly support Youthbuild. This program gives our young people a second chance by teaching them job skills they will need to finish their education and enter the workforce."



Veronica Reed, 19, Hutcherson Yearwood, 23, and Leon Moore, 24, spoke about where their lives were before enrolling in Youthbuild and the help the program provided.

Veronica was kicked out of North Chicago High School for fighting. After a short stint at a school in Milwaukee where she was also expelled, she returned to North Chicago High School before dropping out during her junior year. After working at a local supermarket and Long John Silver's for two years, she joined Youthbuild and now sits on the Student Council. Veronica is now planning to attend college.

Hutcherson Yearwood was referred to Youthbuild by his probation officer. Also a high school dropout, Yearwood earned his GED certificate last year and hopes to go to college.

Leon Moore was a former gang member and dropped out of high school his junior year. After several run-ins with the law, he joined Youthbuild in January, gave up his gang life and is determined to keep his life on the right track.

During the ceremony, Congressman Kirk announced that Youthbuild received a second \$700,000 grant he helped secure from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The grant follows a \$700,000 grant Kirk helped secure in 2004. It will be used to cover trainee stipends, tools, uniforms, rent, training costs, testing costs, supplies, and staffing. Kirk presented the check on the site of Youthbuild's latest project -- immediately following the check presentation; Youthbuild trainees demolished a run-down home in North Chicago. Over the course of a year, their project is to build a new, affordable, single-family home.

"Youthbuild Lake County is making a big difference in our community," said Congressman Kirk. "The program offered a second chance to many young men and women while improving the image and landscape of North Chicago. Youthbuild's efforts to replace run-down homes with new, affordable, single family homes attracted attention from local businesses offering loans and willing to donate supplies. Youthbuild Lake County is changing into a public-private venture that will sustain its work while opening investment opportunities in North Chicago. I am very pleased that HUD added \$700,000 to this program and look forward to seeing a new home on this site next year."

Youthbuild Lake County offers disadvantaged youth ages 16-24 a 10-month program to help turn their lives around through education, job training and life skills. The program built its first home last May and the city of North Chicago vowed to donate three additional lots to Youthbuild so they can continue to build affordable homes for local families.

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